



February 16, 2023

Written testimony of Nicole Lewis, Executive Director, Villa Maria Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Opposition to the Unfunded Nursing Home 4.1 Direct Care Minimum Staffing Mandate

Good afternoon, members of the Human Services and Aging Committees. My name is Nicole Lewis, I am the Executive Director at Villa Maria Nursing and Rehabilitation in Plainfield, Connecticut. Villa Maria is a 62 bed skilled nursing and long-term care facility with approximately 60 employees.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic our staff rose to the challenge of responding to one of the largest public health crises in recent years. We struggled through the worst of the pandemic to maintain staffing as employees came down with COVID and others left healthcare all together. Unfortunately, the struggle to staff the facility has not become any easier.

Recruitment and Retention remains a number one priority for Villa Maria and all skilled nursing facilities across Connecticut. The main issue is that facilities are competing to hire from the same small pool of qualified individuals. Before we can increase the minimum staffing for nursing homes, we need to address the lack of qualified applicants in Connecticut. This issue was predicted many years ago yet there has been little movement to provide the resources needed to fix it. The focus right now should be on the education and training programs available for nurses, nursing assistants, and other healthcare professionals. As we gather today to discuss the need for better staffing, we cannot go without mentioning the closure of L.P.N. and C.N.A. training programs across the state. If we do not focus our efforts on increasing the number of training and education programs, the proposed staffing requirements will never be achieved.

During this staffing crisis, nursing homes have been forced to rely on staffing agencies to fill vacant hours. While we are thankful for these caregivers' assistance, inconsistent and unfamiliar staff are not what is best for our residents. The use of agency staff makes it difficult to educate and hold individuals accountable. The cost associated with using the agency staff has also increased dramatically throughout the pandemic. The agencies are simply taking advantage of this public health crisis and of the facilities that have already been left in a fragile state from the pandemic.

Villa Maria supports having staffing requirements, but the staffing mandate outlined in SB989 is not addressing the real issue at hand. Education and training need to be the priority to assemble our next generation of caregivers in Connecticut. The staffing crisis will not end until attainable solutions are developed.

On behalf of the Villa Maria staff, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicole Lewis

Nicole Lewis, Executive Director